



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

 Canada

ALTRUISM.

BY LIEUT. COLONEL THE HON. JAMES BAKER.

[DEAR MADAM.—Most persons interested in Education—and more especially in Military Education—must during the past year have read with pleasure the many letters appearing on this subject in the *Times*, *Morning Post*, and *United Service Gazette*, over the signature James Baker, Lieut.-Colonel, Inglewood, Parkstone, Dorset. Those who heard his notable lecture on "Education," delivered last May in the theatre of the Royal United Service Institution—since published in the August Journal of that Institution—will undoubtedly attach even greater weight to his opinions. Those who, like myself, have the honour of Colonel Baker's acquaintance, can even better appreciate the sound judgment, ripe experience, and tempered enthusiasm, which are the foundation of all his educational ideas. It is because I am firmly convinced that Colonel Baker's words will be an inspiration to parents and teachers everywhere, that I venture to send you for publication in the *Parents' Review* a lecture of his, delivered at Victoria, British Columbia. Colonel Baker is the last of a famous trio of brothers. The names of Sir Samuel and Valentine will for all time be connected with those of England's most famous explorers and cavalry leaders. In a different field—that of Education—Colonel James Baker has led a no less strenuous life. England's need just now is perhaps even greater for educationalists than for explorers or cavalry leaders. For England's sake let us hope that the last of the brothers will not be the least famous of the three.

Yours faithfully,
Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, B. R. WARD, Major R.E.]
December 14th, 1902.

IT is good for us—it is both useful as well as instructive—to occasionally turn aside from the busy hum, the daily routine and mechanism of life, in order to study what I may term the motors of society, because by so doing we are the better able to understand and appreciate the various forces which are acting upon the temporary habitation of the mind—the body—and which are impelling us either upwards or downwards along the complicated path of evolution according to the direction which we may give to the mysterious and inherited force of "free will" which is at the disposal of every sane man and sane woman.

A student who endeavours to fathom the depths of sociology soon becomes attracted by the hypothesis of the continuity

and augmentation of thought. He realizes that the mind of man is not only influenced and formed by his present environment, but that he is more or less an inheritor of thoughts and conclusions of individuals and generations who have preceded him. For example, the philosophy of Plato, the science of Aristotle, the logic of Socrates did not die and pass away with the decay of their bodies, but they continued to live and are living still to take temporary habitation in the minds and bodies of present and future generations.

And so it is with every individual thought; it forms one of the many units which make up the general evolution of mind, and it will have an impelling or retarding effect upon that evolution according to the disposal of the free will of the individual.

This free will is a mystery in life, and as yet is far beyond our ken, but we are able to recognise the eternity of mind, by means of induction, from the experience of the past and the consequent deductions for the future.

Continuity and augmentation of thought are not mere mental conceptions, but they have been given a substantial form by means of writing and the printing press. A new conception of the mind comes to us by what we call intuition, but that is merely a term which is so indefinite as to mark its uncertainty. How we obtain our ideas we cannot always prove. They may be around us, although invisible—an onward wave of progressive thought which beats against our sensitive brain and leaves some impress there.

But a short time ago we should have laughed to scorn the man who asserted that he could see through a deal door, but we now know how effectively it can be done by means of the Röntgen rays. And so, perhaps, in the far future we may be permitted to see and recognise the mysterious forces which surround us, and which are shaping our thoughts and actions.

But what I want to impress upon you now is that your mind—or soul, if you like so to call it—will go on for ever, and that you therefore have a selfish and personal interest in the future. Whatever the measure of improvement in your mind now, so much will it have gained or added to it in the future; whatever the measure of debasement in your mind now, so much lost ground will it have to make good in the future—as you sow you will reap. This is not only an axiom of religion,

but it is being verified by scientific research. Science has revealed to us two great forces in nature—the force of evolution, or the lifting up of life to a higher order of being, and the force of degeneration, or the gravitation of life towards its primitive form of existence. The dawn of this knowledge was visible in early forms of religion which recognised a creating and a destroying angel, and we recognise it ourselves through our conceptions of God and the devil. Between these two contending forces of evolution and degeneration there stands the mysterious power of free will. We are conscious of its possession, but that is all we know about it.

To gravitate towards a lower order of being is so easy that it requires no effort, it is assisted by the force of gravitation; but to be lifted up to a higher level requires effort. Now, all effort must be at the expense of some other force in nature and produces change, and this change to a higher order of being is evolution.

Scientific research has always indicated certain species and organisms which have all the attributes of degeneration, and there is an interesting example of this gravitation to a lower level in one of the Ascidians known to boys as the "sea-squirt," which is found in the seaweed among the rocks at low water. In appearance it is an oval-shaped, fleshy lump of seaweed, with two orifices at the top. With one it sucks in sea water, and squirts it out with the other in a fatuous sort of manner. But if this apparent lump of seaweed is dissected, it is found to contain a stomach and other organs somewhat resembling those of a human being, and it is a curious fact that the young of this Ascidian are little animals, very similar to young tadpoles, which swim about in the water and after a time fix on to the rocks. Their tails then disappear by atrophy, and it gradually assumes the seaweed form of the sea-squirt. We thus have a short epitome of degeneration in the ontological history of the sea-squirt, which evidently once occupied a far higher position in the scale of life.

We are accustomed to talk of so-and-so as having been a good fellow, but that he has completely run to seed—degenerated, in fact,—and when we look upon the melancholy spectacle of a poor drunken sot, we ask ourselves, what of his further degeneration? It is one of the functions of Altruism to knit together the units of society in order that they may

mutually support each other in the effort to rise to a higher plane of existence, and the teachers of our public schools have cast upon them a grave responsibility in this respect, inasmuch as they have committed to their charge the moulding of immature minds at an age when inherited tendencies are easily directed to either higher or lower aims.

It is a matter of every-day experience that the mind is greatly influenced by its environment. Place a young boy among bad associates and he soon becomes contaminated by their vices; on the other hand, let him be living with those whose thoughts and actions are manly and noble, and he will rise in the scale of humanity—in either case his inherited tendencies will be respectively debased or exalted by his environment. But if you acknowledge the eternity of mind, and if you also acknowledge that mind is greatly influenced by its environment, then you are bound to recognise the obvious fact that the more you can improve the environment—or society—of the future the greater must be the improvement in your own mind or soul. Therefore, it is not only to your interest to improve society in the present, but it is equally to your interest to submit to present sacrifice, if necessary, in order to improve society in the future, when it will also form part of your environment.

The span of bodily life is merely a pulsation in the progress of the soul, and nature affords us many examples of this rhythmic motion. The day alternates with night, the summer with winter; the trees put forth and drop their leaves in regular cadence; we sleep at night to awake in the morning; we take our long rest at the close of bodily life that our soul may awaken refreshed for further activity in a new habitation. But the measure of the rhythm varies greatly in length.

There is no such thing as absolute rest in nature, but everything is more or less in motion—even the atoms of a solid piece of iron or any other metal are in a constant state of vibration. Neither is there any such thing as complete destruction; there is only—change.

And so it is with the mind; it is in progressive motion, and every unit of society has a permanent interest in the movement. Hence the paramount importance of Altruism, or duty towards your neighbour, as a function of sociology.

Now, how shall I convey to you the thoughts which are in

my mind upon this subject? Has it ever occurred to you how thoughts are conveyed from one to another? I must first produce an effort of that mysterious power called my WILL to give direction to my brain. After that the mechanical process sets in. My brain, acting under directions from my will, telegraphs by means of my nerves to certain muscles, which act upon my lungs and tongue; the movement of my lungs creates a current of air through my throat and mouth, and produces what we call sound; the movements of my tongue give inflexions to this sound and form language; the vibrations of this language act upon the particles of air, which impinge upon the drums of your ears, and from thence are conveyed by your nerves to the diaphragm of your brains, upon which they are indented, to be afterwards at the disposal of individual will—and so my thoughts are conveyed to you. It is therefore apparent that a mechanical process is necessary before my thoughts can be placed in conjunction with your thoughts, and the velocity with which thoughts can be transmitted from one to another by this vocal process is limited to the velocity of sound, which varies somewhat as the volume of sound, but at no time is it very great. For example, the sound from the firing of an ordinary cannon would travel at the rate of about thirteen hundred feet per second. But, by means of mechanical contrivances, we are now able to greatly increase not only the velocity but also the distance over which thoughts can be transmitted. The telephone is a long wire with a diaphragm at each end of it; the vibrations of language strike against the diaphragm at one end; from there they are carried by the electric current—which travels at about the same speed as light, or one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles in one second—to the diaphragm at the other end of the wire, and from thence to the drum of the ear of the listener, and so to his brain. By means of the telegraph and the electric current, we can transmit our thoughts at the velocity of one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles per second to almost any part of the world, but in this case the eye and the hand become factors in the operation instead of the voice and the ear. Then, again, the printing press enables us to strike off any number of copies of our thoughts, and to distribute them among a large number of people in a comparatively short space of time.

Therefore, by means of the press and the telegraph, we are able to have placed upon our breakfast table every morning the thoughts of numbers of people from all parts of the world a few hours after the thinking process. Now, you may ask, what has this to do with Altruism? It has a most important bearing upon it, because scientific discovery and mechanical contrivance place us in closer touch with nature, and "a touch of nature makes the whole world kin." It has the effect of greatly enlarging our environment, or, in other words, of increasing the area of our Altruism, and the responsibility cast upon us is proportionate to this increase of area. Society hardly yet realizes the grave importance of this increase in the velocity and distribution of thought and the effect it is having upon the human race.

(To be continued.)